

BAHRAIN

Issued by the "Bahrain Freedom Movement" to promote human and constitutional rights

Elections are over; time to pursue the more important causes

Apart from the ten days of intensive "electioneering" by those who still have faith in the defunct political programme of the ruler, Bahrain has continued to live through one of its bleakest periods in modern history. The spectre of an all-out confrontation between the natives whose identity is being gradually and silently eradicated, and the Al Khalifa ruling family has never been clearer. With mounting international expressions of concern with regards to the deteriorating conditions of human rights, even the closest of allies of the regime are facing mounting pressure to do something. For the first time, the Washington Post called explicitly in its editorial on 22nd October on the Obama administration to speak out against the regime's policy of total disregard to human rights. It argued that the long-standing argument that the US thought it better to engage the Al Khalifa on the issue in private has not worked. Those close to the inner circles of the regime have also expressed dismay at the lack of leadership at these difficult times. No modern political system would hand the control of the country to thugs, torturers, human rights abusers and killers to deal with a volatile situation such as Bahrain. Countries cannot be run by stretching muscles against the natives; Death Squads are not the answer to the mounting political volatility. Torture should not have become the main tool to deal with the dissident activists as it will easily backfire.

It was clear to those international observers who attended the first session of the "trial" of 25 Bahraini natives for allegedly planning to overthrow the Al Khalifa hereditary dictatorship that the ruling family has lost not only the moral war, but also the initiative to direct events and lead the country in the direction of peace, prosperity and reconciliation. Several of them have now privately conceded that at least some of the senior figures of the Al Khalifa could find themselves on the "wanted" list of the international jurisdiction bodies, such as the International Criminal Court. What they saw and heard on 28th October has defied reason. The mutilated bodies of most of the victims who were paraded at the court provide good and damning evidence against those in power. How, in a modern world, could there be such people in position of

power who would allow their subordinates to go to that extent in attempting to exterminate voices of dissent? How could any human heart or mind accept that a disabled person, like Dr Abdul Jalil Al Singace, be denied of his wheelchair and crutches for two months and forced to crawl to the bathroom? Some of these international witnesses may have seen the inmates at Guantanamo and expressed outrage at the way those inmates were being treated with savagery by American soldiers. But, some of them conceded, they had not anticipated what they would encounter at a small court in Bahrain; a country whose leaders have spent millions of dollars to convince the world of their civility. These observers are aware of the cases being prepared against senior figures within the Al Khalifa regime for their role in administering torture, facilitating or condoning it, or being a position to know that it was being used. Since they did nothing to stop it, they are liable to prosecution and could be charged with crimes against humanity. That is serious.

An important saga has just unfolded with the "elections" of the powerless shura council. Several of those who "won" have conceded to their electorates that their hands would be tight when they sit in session in December. They are all aware that the final decision on any bill or decision would be in the hands of those forty people handpicked by the ruler and his lieutenants for membership of the unelected shura council. The new "parliamentarians" will only be able to share with the ruling family its corruption, and would not be partners in decision-making. The whole political process is in the hands of the ruling family, and the talk of democracy and political participation has been proven to be a myth. The "election" saga has also confirmed that hollow nature of the regime's political programme and the inability of a hereditary dictatorship to adapt to modern modes of political activism. The international media corpse which swamped the country had busy times for some investigative journalism. They talked to the families of the political prisoners and had plenty to report on especially the details of torture and ill-treatment. What aston-

ished most is the fact that the Bahraini authorities had failed to convince even their closest allies of the wisdom of their actions against the Bahrainis. When they talked about involving the International Police (Interpol) they made of themselves a laughing stock. Interpol cannot be simply manipulated to play their dirty games. They are there to catch criminals and fugitives, not opponents of repressive regimes. Interpol's mandate clearly says that the international organization does not take up matters of political, religious or ethnic nature. The Al Khalifa have long attempted to portray their opponents as criminals and terrorists but they have not made much headway with those unfounded claims.

Now that the "elections" honeymoon is over, the Al Khalifa have to start counting their losses in terms of public relations and negative publicity. The international journalists had the opportunity to meet also the international human rights activists such as Amnesty International whose officials have been investigating the situation in the country. The regime's desire to stretch its financial muscles and bring many of the media corpse has helped the cause of the oppressed people of Bahrain who had been denied access to the world media. In fact, those behind bars face the charge of communicating with foreign bodies, a charge that has been ridiculed, but yet, is being used as a basis for conviction. Bahrain has now returned to business as usual with more political episodes, trials, protests in the streets and political and religious battles even with those who have become part of the system. For the more serious opposition, the trials are yet another opportunity to show the world how brutal the regime has been and how determined they are to pursue their political activism. As for the senior members of the Al Khalifa, their predicament will start in earnest as victims start proceedings against those criminals who have tortured them and those who have undertaken the Silent Genocide. The ruler himself may find himself on the wanted persons list; this time for his role as the man in charge of genocide being implemented against the native Shia population. That day will not be in the distant future, but could be here soon.

Government loses PR exercise on eve of elections

On the eve of the elections to the half of the members of the powerless shura council, the country is shredded in black as many citizens decided to stay at home and remember those languishing behind bars. As the prospects of a democratic legislature remain as remote as ever, many of the youth have become perplexed by the regime's failure to impress locals and foreigners of the viability of its political project especially in light of the mounting international criticism. The renowned media body, Reporters without borders said in its 2010 World Press Freedom Index that "Bahraini's ranking in the Index dropped from 119th to 144th place, which can be explained by the growing number of imprisonments and trials, notably against bloggers and netizens." The 25 points drop indicated the backward trend in the country's freedoms. Earlier this year Bahrain's ranking on democracy was also brought down by Freedom House which changed its ranking from a place within "countries which are partially free" to "countries which are not free". The largest failure has however happened in the field of human rights. According to Human Rights Watch Bahrain has resumed the use of torture on a large scale. These negative images of the Al Khalifa have become clearer especially as more journalists were allowed into the country to report on the elections. Most free journalists have reported a grim situation that

has removed Bahrain from the ranks of civilised countries into a dictatorship. With authenticated reports of torture and ill-treatment supported by reports and statements from international human bodies, the journalists did not have shortage of material to report. The regime had hoped that the media presence would boost its claims and give it a positive image outside; the reality is different. Apart from the reports sponsored by the regime, almost all free journalists presented negative images of a repressive and despotic regime.

What added authenticity to these reports are the daily events including the arrests, protests and cries from victims of kidnapping and torture. It is now known that Ali Sa'ad, the blind hostage who was arrested for his appearance at the House of Lords Seminar last Summer, has been held at the clinic of Jaw Prison since his arrest six weeks ago. He had been arrested eight times and was injured in a car bomb assassination attempt by the regime's agents. One of his colleagues, Moosa Jaffar, was martyred in the criminal act. Other arrests in recent days include: Hussain Khalil Marhoon, 17 from Nuwaidrat town. His house was raided and he was led away handcuffed. Mahmood Radhi Marhoon, 15 was also arrested from his home in Nuwaidrat. Both were detained on 17th October. One day earlier, Dawood Isa Mushaime, 23, from Marwazan village was arrested at the airport upon his return

from abroad. Nothing has been heard of him since then. Two women arrested last week were remanded in custody after challenging members of the Death Squads last week. A third woman was released.

In its editorial on Thursday 21st October, the Washington Post wrote: "The United States is widely regarded around the Middle East as willing to back corrupt autocracies in exchange for military cooperation or peace with Israel; that perception has been a prime motivator for al-Qaeda and its allies. In the case of Bahrain, the Obama administration appears to have made a concerted effort to mitigate and reverse repression. But in this region, quiet diplomacy is not enough."

In Washington two events were held on Tuesday 19th October. The first was at the Congress where human rights deterioration in Bahrain was discussed. Joe Stork, the Deputy Head of the Middle East Section at Human Rights Watch detailed his findings during his recent visit to Bahrain. He gave a bleak assessment of the situation and called on the US government to take more rigorous action to stop these violations. Maryan Al Khawaja also dealt with the human rights situation. Later in the day a protest was held outside the Bahrain Embassy in Washington. It was a strong protest that made its message loud and clear to the American public.

Bahrain Freedom Movement
22nd October 2010

Attack on women, children as Amnesty issues damning report

In a serious attack on women rights, three women were attacked and arrested by members of Death Squads at the outskirts of Sitra. The women, age 23-33 years, were returning home at around midnight on Saturday when they were stopped at a check point, searched, abused and hand-shackled before being led away to the torture chambers. After frantic search by their families they were told they had been arrested and charged with "abusing the police". They were scheduled to appear at an Al Khalifa court and could face harsh sentences. There is also a fear that they could lose their jobs and other public services. As part of the policy of the "silent genocide" against the natives, Bahrainis are now deprived of such services when they oppose the hereditary dictatorship and call for democracy. The attacks on Shia villages have become routine policy of the ruling family. At 2.30 am on Saturday morning, raids against innocent civilians in Karzakkan were conducted by foreign forces deployed by the Al Khalifa. Young Bahrainis are still being sought for a crime they had not committed. Several members of the Karzakkan Group, have refused to hand themselves up to the Death Squads since their acquittal of the charges by a court earlier this week. The royal court

ordered their re-arrest after they exposed the torture and ill-treatment they had been subjected to while in detention for almost two years. Their homes are under persistent raids and their families have been placed under a state of continuous fear.

Observers at one of the courts yesterday were shocked to see the extent of abuse meted on a child from Sitra who has been in detention for two weeks. His horrific wounds were displayed when he was brought to the court for a trial charged with taking part in protests against dictatorship and ill-treatment of prisoners.

On another level, the youth of Janabiyya took their protest to the main road yesterday, burning tyres near the Canadian University. The road was briefly closed before Death Squads arrived and pursued the youth in the alleys of the town. At the same time the youth of the town of Sar took to the streets calling for the release of the political prisoners and the indictment of the perpetrators of the crimes of torture and silent genocide.

Meanwhile Amnesty International called on the Al Khalifa to allow detainees access to lawyers before the proposed trial on 28th October. In a statement released 13th October it said: "Denying detainees contact with the outside world heightens concern for their safety; when this right is withheld, it

greatly increases the risk of torture and other ill-treatment." As for the use of torture Amnesty International added: "'There must be a thorough, independent investigation by the Bahraini authorities into allegations of torture and other ill-treatment – allegations that cast a dark shadow over Bahrain's human rights record.'"

On 14th October the renowned international, Scholars at Risk network issued an Urgent Action call in regards to Detained Mechanical Engineering Professor Abdul Jalil Al-Singace. After highlighting the ill-treatment and severe torture inflicted on Dr Al Singace, Scholars at Risk invited letters, emails and faxes be sent:

- respectfully calling on authorities to ensure that Bahrain's obligations under international law are upheld with regard to Professor Al-Singace;
- respectfully calling on the authorities to examine the circumstances of Professor Al-Singace's treatment and detention; and
- respectfully calling on authorities to intervene to ensure his well-being, including ensuring immediate and regular access to legal counsel of his choosing, to family and to medical treatment.

http://scholarsatrisk.nyu.edu/Events-News/Article-Detail.php?art_uid=2407

Bahrain Freedom Movement
16th October 2010

International condemnation of aggression by ruling family

The unprecedented reaction of the international human rights community to the recent attack on rights and freedoms in Bahrain has angered the ruling family so much that it has resorted to more aggression against Bahrainis. After moving the prisoners of conscience from the dungeons of the National Security Agency (NSA) to other prisons such as the Dry Dock prison, they were returned for more torture in order to force them to sign incriminating "confessions" prepared by the torturers. Latest brief visits by relatives (most of which lasting no more than five minutes in the presence of several torturers) have confirmed that the Bahrainis have endured more physical coercive acts and that they looked more pale and drawn, although they enjoyed high spirits. Prior to the visits, secret service officers sat with the families and directed them on visitation rules. They were forbidden to ask about torture, charges, proceedings or anything relevant to the cases of the detainees. They were ordered not to speak about what was happening on the outside, or give the detainees any news. The families were also directed not to look at any parts of the detainees' bodies under their clothing. During each visit, there were four to ten secret service officers sitting next to the detainee.

Two families were ordered out after only five minutes. Al-Mukhodher's family was told to leave because Al Mukhodher asked them if a trial date had been set, and Al-Muqdad's family was ordered out after they told him

The ruling family has undertaken more raids on people and property and arrested more people. Yesterday morning, 8th October, scores of Death Squads raided the town of Sanabis, shooting at people using rubber bullets and beating whoever falls while trying to escape. At least one Bahraini was arrested. Abdulla Ali Salman, 16, was shot with a rubber bullet. As he laid on the ground injured he was stepped over by the raiders, beaten up mercilessly and taken away to the Al Khalifa dungeons. Three days ago, three more Bahrainis from Bild Al Qadim after being lured towards the cars of the Death Squads by a spy in the area. Among them were Sadiq Khalil Al Hayki, 16 and Hassan Ibrahim, 16. Many under-age children have been arrested including a ten years old boy.

Meanwhile at least one family from the village of Musalla was forced to leave their house after repeated raids turned their lives into hell. At one point one of their daughters was taken hostage so that the son gave himself up. Eventually the son, Hakim, a known and promising young footballer was arrested. Nothing has been heard about him yet. More young men have also left the village as their lives became hell.

On 7th October the renowned body "Reporters Without Borders" issued a statement expressing concern regarding the violence meted on Dr Abdul Jalil Al Singace since his detention on 13th Au-

gust. He is now believed to have lost hearing in one of his ears. The organization called for his immediate release and urged the international community to put more pressure on the Bahraini authorities to respect the basic rights of citizens in accordance with international conventions. The statement also called for the release of Ali Abdul Imam, the renowned blogger who is being subjected to horrific treatment since his arrest in early October. It also highlighted the repeated threats against Nabeel Rajab, the President of the Bahrain Centre for Human Rights and Abdul Hadi Al Khawaja, Frontline's regional representative.

On a similar note, the International Union of Publishers and News Agencies (WAN-IFRA) urged the government of Bahrain to take all precautions to end its violent campaign against freedom of expression in the country. At the end of its meeting on 4th October in Hamburg the Union detailed the recent crackdown against bloggers and publishers and highlighted the cruel treatment of Ali Abdul Imam. It called for ending the blackout on the campaign against political and human rights activists.

Bahrain Freedom Movement
9th October 2010

Silent genocide amid international concerns

As the stage-managed poorly-produced political play undertaken by Bahrain's ruler gradually fades away both in terms of significance and credibility, the international community begins its slow moves to assess the situation and seriously contemplates action against senior Al Khalifa figures for crimes against humanity. First came the visit to Bahrain by Joshua Colangelo-Bryan on behalf of Human Rights Watch which had been alarmed by the all-out war against political and human rights activists. The visit lasted five days during which Mr Colangelo-Bryan met with the families of the detainees and their lawyers to document the horrible torture inflicted on Bahrainis by the ruling Al Khalifa family. He also documented some of the cases of Bahrainis who had been kidnapped and tortured by the notorious Death Squads.

Just as Mr Colangelo-Bryan was preparing to leave Bahrain another human rights defender landed. Mr Vincent Forest of Frontline wanted to see for himself the realities on the ground. He later said that there is an ocean between the claims and realities in regards to the regime's actions and policies. The lack of access to lawyers and families and the continued incommunicado detentions are contrary to Bahrain's undertaking to respect human rights in accordance with the international conventions. He also said that targeting human rights defenders is a serious crime that could lead to silence that allows torture and other ill-treatment of detainees easier to commit.

On Saturday 2nd October three Bahrainis from Sanabis Town were arrested during raids on houses. They are three innocent brothers, snatched from their families and taken to torture chambers. They are: Mohammed Jamil Tahir Al Sami', 24, Abbas Jamil Tahir Al Sami', 21 and Ali Jamil Tahir Al Sami', 20. Nothing has yet been heard of their whereabouts. In another raid in the early hours of yesterday, Sunday 3rd October, another attack on the same village led to the arrest of a young boy. Salman Mulla Hassan Zain Eldin, 21, was snatched by Death Squads and taken to an unknown destination. The young Bahraini had been

abducted in August and released after being subjected to extensive torture. His case had been documented as evidence against the minister of national security agency, Khalifa bin Abdulla Al Khalifa who has become notorious for introducing severe forms of torture unheard of in the past. He was the Al Khalifa Ambassador in London.

In another negative development, ten Bahrainis were remanded in custody for further sessions of torture. They had been arrested on Eid Day as they shouted pro-democracy slogans at the main City Centre Mall in Manama.

Meanwhile, the people have reacted to the total control imposed by the ruling family on the local media, by reverting to the old style of writing slogans on the walls. In Bilad Al Qadeem, pro-democracy slogans were painted on the road leading to the main mosque where Sheikh Abdul Jalil Al Miqdad used to lead prayers before he was banned. This is in addition to sporadic skirmishes between the Bahraini natives and the notorious riot police and Death Squads whose members are largely foreigners imported to wage war against the natives.

What has now become a serious cause for concern is the role assigned to the local media which is controlled by the ruling family. The human rights violations are often preceded by sedition by this media and loud "calls" from the mouthpieces of the regime to crackdown against the opposition. In recent weeks, calls have been made to strip members of the opposition of their citizenship, a step taken to enforce the view that the ruler, Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa has become deeply involved in what has now become known as the "silent genocide". While foreigners are being naturalised, natives are denied their citizenship for opposing the dictatorial regime. The ruler has sent an unambiguous letter to the Bahrainis that the Al Khalifa occupiers would not stop at anything in their plan to strangle the natives.

Bahrain Freedom Movement
4th October 2010

Authenticated reports of torture by independent investigators

The Press Conference held on Monday 11th October at Room 3, the House of Lords, highlighted the latest report by the Islamic Human Rights Commission, titled "Broken Promises", prepared by Omar Ahmad. Lord Avebury inaugurated the meeting which was attended by several news channels and human rights bodies. At least two British public relations companies sent their staff to monitor the event.

Lord Avebury started by welcoming the audience and said that this is the second press conference in few weeks. This is unusual situation. None of our pleas to open access to detainees has been heeded. There were some visits by families but were warned not ask questions from the detainees about their torture or tell them about what is happening outside about their case. Lawyers had little access and were warned against talking about the ordeal of the detainees. There have been protests on almost daily basis. The people are conscious over detentions without trials. We need to consider what further actions need to be taken. The Human Rights Council in Geneva needs to be involved. Last week, we had a question session at the House of Lords about detainees. Baroness Falkner put some questions to the Minister, Lord Howell. I proposed allowing the UN Special Rapporteurs on Torture, Arbitrary Detention and the Protection of Human Rights Defenders. These Rapporteurs must ask for visits to Bahraini jails. Our Minister said that a favourable reply was possible. We wrote to the Special Rapporteurs. No visit has ever taken place before. Today, we are also launching the new report by the Islamic Commission for Human Rights.

Then Baroness Falkner delivered some remarks about the situation. She said that the view among the Western Governments is that those in the Gulf who had elections in Gulf countries did well, and that would lead to domino effect. Tolerance to low level of transgression of human rights would lead to better political outcome. In the past few months this proved to be wrong. They believed a bit of human rights violations was god. We now see that in Bahrain this did not work. If we listened to Bahrain's Terrorism Bill 2006, we would have been vigilant. We were naïve in the West, that low level conversation with some officials would lead to good outcome. We were wrong. She said that on 5th August I chaired a meeting at the House of Lords. Later I found out that three of those who had attended were subsequently arrested. That is outrageous. The Bahraini Ambassador said we were naïve claiming that other states were involved without naming one. I said most countries have other countries with whom they cannot go on well. Even democratic countries have this problem. When I mentioned our anxiety to him, the Bahraini Ambassador did not understand.

Then we met our Foreign Secretary and he intervened by calling the Crown Prince of Bahrain about Mr Jaffar Al Hesabi. Last week the Bar Human Rights Committee publisher their fantastic report. They were extremely concerned. There are now calls for Special Rapporteurs to visit Bahrain. The Bar Human Rights Committee wants to meet Bahraini lawyers during their current visit, but those lawyers would not be able to disclose the details of the detainees terrible experiences. The Bar delegation likes to meet the ministers involved. I am also told that there will be peers to Bahrain later this month. Lord Avebury and myself have not been invited to go on this trip. This means that we are not trusted because we raised such issues. I told Ambassador unless there is dialogue with those in jail there will be no lasting solution. The Ambassador was naïve to deny the need for such dialogue. If there is a delegation we must be part of it.

Lord Avebury then said; After 5th August meeting three of those who attended were arrested. That was bad. It means there is no dialogue with opposition.

Baroness Falkner then said that when she told the Ambassador that some of the prisoners were detained because they had met me, he denied that. Then I produced the Al Watan newspaper, which loyal to the regime and showed him the main photo that was used to prove their guilt. It was a photo taken during the meeting of 5th August, including myself.

Then Omar Ahmad, the author of ICHR's report spoke. He said that on 13th August, Dr Al Singace was arrested. The wheel chair, polio-riddled activist was severely tortured. Other detainees are Sheikh Mohammad Habib Al Miqdad, Abdul Ghani Khanjar and Abdul Hadi Al Saffar. In the report we dealt with thematic issues of human rights violations, repression, exclusion of the majority etc. It contains details of a sour history. It dealt with reforms under Hamad who had pledged to change the situation. Although he disbanded the State Security Court, little else has been done. He indicated he was for dialogue and held a referendum on the Charter. But he reneged on his pledges and undermined the 1973 Constitution. His promises of reforms were inadequate. There were many utterances but little action. There is also the charges of corruption and nepotism. It seems that the system cannot be reformed. The report deals with discrimination, repression, migrants workers (estimated at 455,000), construction and domestic labour and a list of human rights problems. In 1999, the Shia occupied 20 percent of high office, but representation is much less now. Human rights violations have now become symptomatic of a weak government, and torture is used extensively. Since 2007 torture has become a routine treatment of prisoners including the use of electric shocks and hanging. Bahrain is now at crossroads. The elections are undermined by continuous harassment. Bahrain speaks of reform but power is still concentrated in

the hands of the Al Khalifa. We made several recommendations; the need to have transparency at all levels, eradication of corruption by senior Al Khalifa, respect of the rights of the migrant workers, ending the systematic discrimination against the Shia especially in the fields of security, defence and general employment, stop the demographic engineering, grant detainees legal representation, the torture must be investigated, the prohibition of torture, the release of the prisoners of conscience, allow free press. For this to be achieved the international community must question the government. The recent tensions are the latest episode in the conflict between the Al Khalifa and the people, sources of which lie in the problems with housing, unemployment, exclusion and corruption.

Massoud Shajarah, the President of ICHR said that we should tell the Al Khalifa that there is opportunity to improve the situation through dialogue, cooperation with the people and respect of the majority.

David Gotlib, who went to Bahrain in March 2009 during the detention of Mr Hassan Mushaime and Sheikh Mohammad Habib Al Miqdad, spoke briefly about his experience. He said when we went to Bahrain, we realized our FCO was not doing enough. He suggested to build a core of lawyers who will stand up for the human rights violations. We could help and support Bahraini lawyers.

Then Usama Danshyar, another lawyer who visited Bahrain last year raised the possibility of training Bahraini lawyers, and then they can take a role in Bahrain. The Bahraini government will then be talking to a member of the Bar. The Bar human rights committee and Council are ready to help. In Pakistan the government had to back down when the Bar and judiciary took strong stands. If our government can fund some lawyers then that will make the task easier.

Hassan Mushaime said few words. He said that we have a government which is a biological liar. They talk of burning tyres and present this as terrorism. Peaceful activists are banned. When they allowed some families to visit their sons in jails, they forced the detainees to wear heavy and thick clothes to hide their injuries, and prevented them from talking about their ordeals.

Saeed Shehabi talked about "Torture, Money and Services" arguing that even in this room there are victims who are ready to testify about the torture they had endured. He said the FCO is not serious to intercede on behalf of Jaffar Al Hesabi, who is a UK national undergoing extensive torture in Bahraini jails. He also talked of the infliction of punishment before the crime is proven, such as the case with Ahmad Jawad Al Fardan whose house was taken by the regime immediately after his arrest, and Abdul Ghani Khanjar and Dr Abdul Jalil Al Singace whose employment was terminated after their arrest. He complimented the ICHR report and called for implementation of its recommendations.